

***Congressman***  
***J. Randy Forbes***  
***Fourth District of Virginia***



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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***Forbes' Bill to Bridge Digital Divide Passes House Committee***

**Washington, D.C.** – Today, the House Science Committee approved legislation introduced by Congressman J. Randy Forbes (VA-04). The bill **H.R. 2801, The Minority-Serving Institution Digital & Wireless Network Technology Opportunity Act of 2003**, would establish a new grant program within the Department of Commerce, providing up to \$250 million to help Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges bridge the economic opportunity gap.

This legislation is designed to strengthen and upgrade the technological infrastructure at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI's). It would offer opportunities to MSI's such as computer acquisition, campus wiring and technology training, enabling them to offer students the same access that students at other institutions of higher learning have.

Speaking before the committee today, Forbes stated, "Full access to technology has become the standard, not a bonus, in how we communicate and do our jobs everyday. Right now, 60 percent of all jobs require information technology skills and information technology jobs pay significantly higher than jobs in non-technology related fields, yet minority-serving institutions lack the basic information and digital technology infrastructure needed to provide their students the necessary skills and access to compete and qualify for America's best paying jobs."

At today's committee mark-up, Forbes cited a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* revealing that at Virginia State University, which is located within the Fourth District, only 10 percent of the students own computers, compared to 96 percent of students at the University of Richmond.

"Only three percent of the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities indicated that financial aid was available to help their students close the computer ownership gap. This legislation will strengthen these institutions, and all Minority-Serving Institutions, so they can provide their students the access and the resources necessary to compete in our technology-dependent world," Forbes commented after the mark-up.

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Virginia State University (VSU) is a Historically-Black University within Forbes' congressional district. University President, Eddie N. Moore, Jr. commented on his support for the Congressman's legislation: "Over the past years, we have made great strides in our technological capabilities that have allowed us to become a better university. The opportunities this legislation affords will undoubtedly attract students to VSU who are already strongly acclimated to the technology environment. By providing funds, so that we are able to accelerate the development of our technology infrastructure, the future of HBCU's in general, and specifically VSU is much brighter."

"This legislation is a step in the right direction. By addressing the technology deficiencies that exist at minority serving institutions and increasing access to technology we can provide our young people, with the tools to success in college and life," Forbes concluded.

The *Minority-Serving Institution Digital & Wireless Network Technology Opportunity Act of 2003* is scheduled for review by the full House this fall.

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